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ABSTRACT

In an effort to develop a more effective means of teaching minority content, a course focusing on Native American issues was implemented at Northern Michigan University. The students involved in the project had very limited experience with minority group members, and those exposed to Native Americans often had negative stereotyped notions. The course consisted of six 2-hour integrative seminar sessions held with two tribal instructors at an Ojibwa reservation 70 miles from campus. The first half of the academic year focused on group work methods, while the second half focused on community practice, with students encouraged to develop relationships with tribal members at the reservation. The first field visit provided an orientation to Native American culture held at the Tribal Courtroom, while the second session provided a review of the initial meeting and additional time to meet with tribal members. The third session introduced the students to the human service units that existed within the tribal organization, focusing on the differences related to practicing in the tribal culture as opposed to students' own practice of social work. The second semester was designed to focus on organizational and community change as opposed to direct practice. Student evaluations pointed to the difficulties of transportation arrangements and additional time commitment as serious issues which should be addressed before duplicating the program. (TGI)

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Teaching Minority Content: A Community Based Model.

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TEACHING MINORITY CONTENT: A COMMUNITY BASED MODEL

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Abstract
This project involved an attempt at creating a new and more effective means of teaching minority content. The audience were senior social work students all involved in their major field placement experience. The focus for the project involved Native American content and was to involve examining, close up, direct service applications as they involved an Indian population. The teaching plan called for looking at clinical applications of social work services within the context of the tribal organization. This particular project happened to involve an Indian reservation, however, this method of "going to where the learning is" has some broader implications, particularly for dealing with minority groups and minority issues.

The concept contained within this presentation grew out of an effort to teach more effectively. It has long been my belief that there are simple, creative activities available to us that make learning both more fun and more educationally profitable. This particular project involved an attempt at creating a new and more effective means of teaching minority content. The audience, in this case, were senior social work students all involved in their major field placement experience. The vehicle for this teaching effort was a once a week, half-day seminar. The primary effort here was to attempt to integrate the teaching of minority content with the methods material in some more complete fashion than had ever been done with this course.

The focus for the project involved Native American content and was to involve examining, close up, direct service applications as they involved an Indian population. An Ojibwa reservation within a two hour drive from the campus was chosen as the site for the training. I was able to secure a $3,000 grant through a special fund, The Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Caesar Chavez Fund. That basic grant was supplemented with an additional $1,000 from within the University (College of Behavioral Science, Human Service, and Education) in order to carry out this project.

The plan involved going to the reservation, with the complete group of students (approximately 25), to spend a minimum of six full days on location. The design called for making three visits each semester so that this piece of curriculum would literally be extended over the entire academic year. The grant money was budgeted so as to provide for transportation for the students to and from the reservation, duplication of educational materials, and for hiring two instructors from the reservation. The instructors were both social work professionals in their own right and were on staff of the tribal center, in critical positions with regard to the health and human services activities of the center. The actual curriculum, the teaching plan, was developed by the tribal instructors and was coordinated with the University instructor. Decisions about what to include, what not to include, and what to emphasize were essentially made by the tribal instructors.

Before detailing the actual project and discussing the outcomes from this effort, two of the goals for this session are defined:

1. The first goal is simply to share an innovative idea that worked, in the hope that it may stimulate similar ideas to be carried out in the context of other's teaching environments.

2. The second goal, a hope really, is to encourage some discussion from within the group regarding this model and other possible applications.

The following is a sketch of the background which produced this project.

The teaching of content about minority populations and the efforts to sensitize students to minority values, positions, difficulties, etc., is not easily accomplished. The need to teach about race, ethnic, and subgroup difference really

requires no explanation here. for teachers are all well aware of the importance of this content to their own areas of teaching practice. However, in no case is it more important that students grasp and have a working knowledge of this material than in the practice of social work.

The National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics provides an overarching set of standards that clearly speaks to the need for cultural sensitivity. The Code speaks about the "primacy of client interest" and making "every effort to foster maximum self-determination on the part of clients." Program standards, as outlined by the Council on Social Work Education (social work education's accrediting body), are even clearer with regard to the mandate to include minority content. Program evaluative standard 12 states:

> The program shall make specific, continuous efforts to assure the enrichment of the educational experience it offers by reflecting racial, ethnic and cultural diversity throughout the curriculum and in all categories of persons related to the program.

Wynetta Devore and Elfriede Schlesinger in their text Ethnic-Sensitive Social Work Practice speak about a "professional perspective" that includes four "layers of understanding."

These layers are comprised of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are important for all approaches to practice. These are:

1. A basic knowledge of human behavior.

2. A self awareness, including insights into one's own ethnicity and an understanding of how that may influence professional practice.

3. The impact of the ethnic reality upon the daily life of clients.

4. The adaptation and modification of skills and techniques in response to the ethnic reality.

The problems associated with developing a heightened sense of multiculturalism and responsiveness to minority issues is made somewhat more difficult in this remote and rural region of the Upper Peninsula. First, the University exists in an area of primary woodlands and forests (90% of the region is forested), and the principle industries relate to mining (both iron ore and copper), the timber industries, and recreation and tourism. It is largely a rural area of 16,538 square miles in size, comparable to the states of Massachusetts and New Hampshire combined, with a population of 313,000.

The population of the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) is largely caucasian with European, often Scandinavian, ethnic backgrounds. The most significant minority present are Native Americans owing to the presence of five reservations scattered across the region. It was, therefore, a natural choice that this project focused on Native American life. The 1990 census reveals that, throughout the entire Upper Peninsula, there are only 4,116 Afro-American citizens. This works out to be roughly about 1% of the population; however, even this figure is considerably misleading. There are, in the U.P., eight correctional institutions, three maximum security prisons, five medium to minimum security institutions, and at least three prison camps. The majority of the listed Black residents are housed in one or another of these institutions and are only encountered by a prison staff which is primarily white. In many cases, the custodial staff are native to the Upper Peninsula and have only met people of color as correctional inmates. Obviously, their experiences are limited, and their impressions often negatively biased. Away from the counties where the prison facilities exist, there are statistics like one Black person living in all of Keweenaw County, four Blacks living in Iron County, five Blacks in Mackinaw, 16 in Delta County which is the site of the second largest city in the Upper Peninsula. Again, the largest concentrations of Blacks are in the three counties, Chippewa, Marquette, and Alger, where the most of the prison facilities are located. For example, in Chippewa County the census data reveals there to be 2,184 Afro-Americans; however, there are five correctional institutions clustered together on what was a former air force base site.

Indeed, for the most part, students have a very limited experience with minority group members. Interestingly, where students have grown up in an area where there is either an Indian reservation or a significant Native American population, there are often negative, stereotyped notions which leave them less than objective. The faculty works, therefore, to incorporate as much minority content throughout the curriculum as possible.

Design of the Project

The particular course utilized for this project was a two-hour integrative seminar course that also has responsibility for teaching new methods as well (The course has since been elevated to three-credit hours). It is integrative from the point of view that it helps students pull together and blend field practice activity with the academic portion of the curriculum that they have already experienced. Additionally, though, the seminar introduces new methods content as well; group work methods are the focus for the first half of the year and organization and community practice are the subject for the last half of the year. All students are engaged in their major field practice experience, so all have an agency and are involved in direct social work practice. Typically, the students take no more than two courses in addition to their field practice experience, which is the equivalent of two days per week. In short, their time is a bit freer, and they have more schedule flexibility than students committed to a full-time (16-credit hour) academic class load.

Typically, some time throughout the year would be devoted to introducing social work practice issues related to minority populations. Guest lecturers have always been brought onto campus and the students involved with them to the extent that is possible. Assigned readings and classroom handouts are utilized but, again, they have limited usefulness.

It occurred to me that if, somehow, the students could be immersed in the actual environment being studied, a great deal more learning might occur. The presence of an Ojibwa reservation just 70 miles from campus made that idea seem feasible. If, however, students were to be taken to the site, instead of bringing resource people in, there would be some logistical and resource planning needed. First, it would cost considerably more to transport the students, and so money and some system of transportation was indicated. Actually, this University had long been advocating more minority content and thus had been making some funds available for speakers and programs that would promote multicultural awareness. It was just a short step from having the idea to writing a simple proposal to secure the special funding that was made available. For some reason, the grant was limited to $3,000 from the primary funding source which necessitated seeking additional money through the University. In fact, the Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Caesar Chavez funding was limited to the cost of hiring the tribal instructors, and that fact, necessitated additional funding for transportation and the duplication of printed materials. Probably, at any given time, everyone might have access to some similar source of funding, although one might have to be resourceful enough to discover that source.

The tribal center instructors received $1,500 each which amounted to $250.00 each for each of the six sessions. Their responsibility for planning and implementing the class was very complete, however. I did coordinate the effort to be sure the class sessions met the learning requirements of this seminar, but they chose the content and designed the presentation of material. They were also responsible for grading the assignments which were developed including a research paper related to this project.

Transportation involved one University vehicle and private automobiles in a car pooling arrangement. Students who drove were reimbursed $15.00 per trip. A figure of ten dollars per student was used to plan the cost of duplicating written materials.

Class Design and Rationale

As indicated, it was intended that there would be six visits that would extend over the entire academic year. There is learning that occurs over time that, in my estimation, can only occur over time. I felt that the time span of eight months created an educational opportunity that could never be duplicated with a few "snapshot" lectures or one or two visits. The idea was to help the students develop relationships with tribal personnel and seek out their own directions to as great a degree as possible. It was conjectured that as the staff and/or citizens of the reservation came to know the students they would also extend themselves and design some unique learning experiences for them individually. This would come about in two ways essentially. First, the students were expected to take the initiative

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and meet as many individuals as possible and, secondly, the students had to select some area of interest in order to develop a research paper. As they explored the tribal organization, the students were free to select any facet of human service delivery they chose for their research project. One student, for example, wanted to learn about Native American healing techniques and ended up with a relationship with a Medicine Man who lived in Minnesota. He was a relative of someone who lived at the Keweenaw Bay reservation. This was an excellent example of what I had hoped might happen.

The first three sessions (Fall semester) were designed to be both an orientation to that Native American culture and to the organization of human services as brought about by that tribe. The students met initially in the Tribal Courtroom, heard about the organization of the tribe, learned something about the history and evolution of this particular reservation, met and heard from tribal elders, met their instructors, and had some informal time over lunch and after class with everyone present.

The second session provided some review of the initial meeting and made some time available to "renew" the relationships begun earlier. On this occasion, the students were placed in smaller groups and were taken on a tour of the vast reservation land. Additional reservation staff were brought in to assist with the tours, and the students began to meet other tribal members in a variety of roles. Everyone ended this session with a somewhat different experience and with a different set of relationships from others. In short, they were all beginning to experience the reservation and the tribal organization somewhat differently. It would become clear, when they were back on campus, that they had somewhat different versions of the experience to share with each other. This, of course, was a real plus.

The third session then introduced the students to the human service units that existed within the tribal organization, i.e. Foster Care, Protective Services, Residential Care, Substance Abuse, Health Services, etc. Now the students were permitted to select one of these areas for further exploration. Frequently, this choice was made on the basis of whatever they were involved in for their field practice. In other words, students in a family agency setting tended to select the same service area at the tribal center to study. In this context, then they began to understand some of the variations and nuances involved with practicing in that culture as opposed to their own practice of social work. Many of the students were interested enough that they began to seek out literature sources and to look for explanations from the tribal staff. By the end of the first semester, every student had made some investment in the project and had gained some special knowledge that other students might not have. They knew somewhat different people and, of course, had different perspectives on the same phenomenon.

Every student was expected to select their topic for the research paper by the end of the first semester and now each of them was also in a relationship with the two tribal instructors. Those topics had to be screened and given some preliminary approval and that necessitated meeting with the instructors.

The second semester was designed so that the focus would be on organizational and community change as opposed to direct practice. It was interesting that just at the beginning of the second semester there was a change in leadership of the tribe and both of the instructors became political victims in that they were fired from the positions with the tribe. That effectively cut off access to the reservation temporarily; however, the students and college staff examined the organizational changes that were occurring, and it fit nicely into the educational plan.

Logistics

The details of arranging transportation, organizing car pools, getting people there on time, etc. were somewhat complicated. First, many of the students in the program are commuters coming from as far away as 70 or 80 miles from campus. Those students who lived in Marquette could rather easily gather for car pooling; however, those commuters made the trip from wherever their home community happened to be. Winter weather and hazardous road conditions proved to be somewhat of a problem, and, occasionally, people were either late or could not make the trip at all. The other major problem was that in order to carry this project out the students had to commit considerably more time than they would have to just complete the two-credit hour course. Travel time was probably a minimum of three hours, and then the time spent at the reservation was approximately five hours on each visit. In general, the students were curious enough and excited enough about the project that they were willing to devote

this much time; however, it became clear that a few students were upset or angry about the additional time commitment.

Summary

One of the problems with creative and innovative approaches to learning is that they often require special time, additional planning, extraordinary efforts and something additional on the part of the students as well as the instructor. Projects, such as this one, do not neatly fit the format of the traditional university schedule, and so probably are frequently not even considered. If I had more carefully thought about some of the logistical problems, I, too, might not have proceeded. I am happy, however, that I did carry this project out because I feel there was a quality of learning that just would not have been available in the classroom. A few students felt the program was a "waste" of their time and that they did not essentially learn anything different. In some cases, even the students who felt they gained the most complained gently about the additional time commitment and the fact that they may have had to make special arrangements for child care or for work. I haven't yet solved the problem of how to gain this kind of experience without those headaches. I do feel, however, that it is worth pursuing because I felt that experience that I saw unfolding was dramatically different qualitatively than my other attempts to teach this content. By the end of this project, there were some significant relationships in place involving student and staff or residents of the Keweenaw Bay community. One student stated in an evaluation:

> Personally, this experience has enabled me to come to terms with past feelings and thoughts concerning this population. Not only have I been able to develop new insights, I have developed a special appreciation for Native Americans.

Another student stated:

> I enjoyed learning about the Indian culture and life on the reservation. I have come to appreciate their unique problems.

One real benefit was the time students had in their separate car pools to process the day's activities. In this connection, three or four Native American students, not officially involved with the class, were invited who interacted with the others and brought even different perspectives on the experience. This was an enrichment that hadn't been expected.

Of course there were a number of statements included in the evaluations indicating that "we should bring the speakers to the students."

One side benefit related to an improved relationship between the University and certain Reservation staff. They seemed to view this effort as a credible attempt to let them tell their "own story."

From the perspective of an educator, this project was particularly good for me. It meant that I had to let go of certain control and responsibility regarding this teaching assignment, and it was healthy for me to do that. Certain points were not made in the way I would have made them or perhaps those points were not made at all. The timing of demonstrating certain information was different than had I been managing it. In short, I also had to wait and listen and learn along with all of the students. I learned a great deal as a result of being in that position.

That, briefly, is my experience with an experimental project designed to more effectively teach minority content. While I felt personally rewarded for having made this effort, I have not yet been able to develop a more efficient means of duplicating the program. I would welcome any comments, suggestions, or impressions you might have concerning my effort, and I would especially welcome your ideas about how to carry this idea into other arenas. Thank you for your worthwhile participation.